

Fall 8-15-1997

ENG 3099C-099: Myth and Culture, Honors

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English 3099C
Section 99

Myth and Culture, Honors

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Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, we will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding. We will be reading primary texts of myths as well as secondary criticism, and the class will consist of lecture and discussion based upon these readings. The course is divided into roughly 4 sections: Tibetan Buddhist Mythology (Myth and Religion, Myth and Biography); Navajo Mythology (Myth and Culture, Myth and Nature); Mayan Mythology (Myth and Cosmology, Myth and History); Greco-Roman Mythology (Myth and Art, Myth and Literature). Along the way, we will be discussing other traditions as well as our own mythologies and how we interact with them.

Required texts:

Dundes, A. *Sacred Narrative*
Lhalungpa, L. *The Life of Milarepa*
Ovid. *Metamorphoses*.
Tedlock, D. *Popol Vuh*
Zolbrod, P. *Diné Bahane': The Navaho Creation Story*

Grading:

Papers	300 pts. (100, 200)
Journal	150 pts.
Supplementary Reading	150 pts.
Reports	150 pts.
Class Myth	100 pts.
<u>Attendance/Participation</u>	<u>150 pts.</u>
Total	1000 pts.

Information for Students with Disabilities:

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Papers:

There will be one shorter paper (1000 words) and one longer paper (1500-2000 words). The first paper will be a group effort, suggested topics will be distributed and groups determined well in advance of the due date to allow you ample time for meetings and division of assignments. The second paper will be an individual project, due the last day of class at the latest. Both papers will be about issues in the reading and how they relate to our own mythologies. Both papers must be handed in on time to receive full credit.

Journal:

You will be expected to keep a response journal on your reading. Each entry is due on the date it is listed in the syllabus. I will pick these up daily and return them to you the next class. Each entry should be 1-2 pages handwritten or the equivalent typed. They will be evaluated on a + √ - Ø basis. Please see the "Guidelines for Reponse Journal" for further information.

Supplementary Reading:

Each of us (yes, I will do this, too!) will be reading a modern novel or book on some aspect of one of the four cultures we will be studying. We will keep journals and notes on this reading in preparation to discussing it with the class. I have devoted a couple of days at the end of the semester for these discussions, but if anyone finishes early, I would recommend a presentation closer to when we are discussing the culture which the presentation covers.

Reports:

Three times in the semester, groups within the class will be reading different assignments on myth theory which they will present to their peers. You will have some class time to prepare for these days and you will be expected to hand in both a written version of your report (this may be in note form) and a response to reports you have heard.

Class Myth:

There will not be a final in this class. In place of a final, we as a group will be constructing a class myth or series of myths. You will have class time to prepare this assignment, but may find that you also have to do work individually or in groups outside of class. The entire class will get one grade for this project, with adjustments made based on your evaluation of each other. More information will follow around week 5 when you have a better understanding of the definitions and functions of myth.

Attendance:

I take attendance each class period, but there are no points assigned to attendance itself. You are responsible for taking care of your own absences: getting the notes from a classmate, getting any handouts and assignments from me. It is obviously in your best interest to attend class every time because you will *always* miss something if you do not. See "Participation" for more information.

Participation:

150 points are allocated for participation. Keep up with the reading and come to class! We will also have frequent group projects that will be conducted in class. I will generally provide you with a question or task that you will address in small groups. Although the written and oral products of each group will be evaluated, what is most important is active participation. There will be no make-ups given on group assignments and in-class activities.

Course Objectives

- to break down cultural misunderstandings and barriers--
- to recognize similarities among cultures--
- to learn what myths are and how they function--
- to learn about cultures that may be unfamiliar--
- to learn more about our own culture and mythology--
- to learn different ways of teaching about cultures and texts--
- to enjoy --

Syllabus

(Reading Assignments are in italics and must be completed by the date they are listed;
writing assignments; homework, etc. listed in bold on due date)

Quotation of the Week:

"Myths are other peoples' religion." (Sam Keen)

Tu Aug 26 Introduction -- What Is Myth?
Diagnostic Survey, Writing Sample
Video: *Fantasia*

Unit I: Myth and Religion, Myth and Biography ----- *Life of Milarepa*

Th Aug 28 Introduction to Buddhism

Quotation of the Week:

"Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be expressed in words."
(Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian philosopher)

Tu Sept 2 *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 9-35

Th Sept 4 *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 41-88
[You may skip the songs/poems]

Quotation of the Week:

"The real point of myth is not to give an objective world picture; what is expressed in it, rather, is
how we human beings understand ourselves in the world."
(Rudolf Bultmann, German theologian)

Tu Sept 9 *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 89-145
[You may skip the songs/poems]

Th Sept 11 NO CLASS

Quotation of the Week:

"Myth explains the why and how of the here and now."
(Th. P. Van Baaren, professor of science and religion)

Tu Sept 16 *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 146-197
[You may skip the songs/poems]

Unit II: Myth and Culture, Myth and Nature ----- *Dine Bahane*

Th Sept 18 Perspectives on Myth I
Reports due
Introduction to Navajo Culture

Quotation of the Week:

"Myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates the inner meaning of the universe and of human
life." (Alan Watts, British expositor of Buddhism to the West)

- Tu Sept 23 *Dine Bahane*, part 1
- Th Sept 25 *Dine Bahane*, part 2, pp. 81-125

Quotation of the Week:
 "Myths are the day dreaming of the human race."
 (Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis)

- Tu Sept 30 *Dine Bahane*, part 2, 126-168
Group conferences
- Th Oct 2 *Diné Bahane'*, part 3, 171-224
Group conferences

Quotation of the Week:
 "The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth." (Aristotle, Greek philosopher)

- Tu Oct 7 *Diné Bahane'*, Part 3, pp. 224-278; part 4, pp. 281-292
- Th Oct 9 Perspectives on Myth II
Reports due

Unit III: Myth and Cosmology, Myth and History ----- *Popol Vuh*

Quotation of the Week:
 "These things never happened, yet they always are."
 (Saloustios, 4th century Greek scholar)

- Tu Oct 14 Introduction to Mayan culture
Video: *Spirit of the Jaguar*
- Th Oct 16 *Popol Vuh*, parts 1 and 2

Quotation of the Week:
 "There is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it. Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity." (F. Max Müller, linguist and scholar of myth)

- Tu Oct 21 Video: *Popol Vuh*
- Th Oct 23 *Popol Vuh*, part 3

Quotation of the Week:
 "To create a myth, that is to say, to venture behind the reality of the sense to find a superior reality, is the most manifest sign of the greatness of the human soul and the proof of its capacity for infinite growth and development."
 (Louis-Auguste Sabatier, French Protestant theologian)

- Tu Oct 28 *Popol Vuh*, parts 4 and 5
- Th Oct 30 NO CLASS

Quotation of the Week:
"Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation into life and death."
(Joseph Campbell, myth scholar)

Tu Nov 4 Perspectives on Myth III
 Reports due

Unit IV: Myth and Art, Myth and Literature ----- *Metamorphoses*

Th Nov 6 Introduction to Roman Religion
 Group Paper due

Quotation of the Week:
"Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends are so foreign to a student's
experience that he cannot believe them to be true."
(Robert Graves, British poet and myth scholar)

Tu Nov 11 *Metamorphoses*, Book 1
 Myths of the Golden Age
 Conferences

Th Nov 13 *Metamorphoses*, Book 2
 Conferences

Quotation of the Week:
"Myth is neither conscious poetry nor valid science, but the common root and raw material of
both." (George Santayana, philosopher)

Tu Nov 18 *Metamorphoses*, Books 3 and 4

Th Nov 20 *Metamorphoses*, Books 5 and 6

THANKSGIVING BREAK -- NO CLASS

Quotation of the Week:
"Myth gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he
does understand the universe."
(Claude Levi-Strauss, French anthropologist)

Tu Dec 2 *Metamorphoses*, Books 7-10

Th Dec 4 Reports on supplementary reading
 Paper due

Quotation of the Week:
"Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present."
Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author

Tu Dec 9 Reports on supplementary reading
Preparation for class mythtelling

Th Dec 11 Reports on supplementary reading
Preparation for class mythtelling

Quotation of the Week:
Myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'supernatural') into the World. Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true story,' because it always deals with *realities*. The cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the World is there to prove it." (Mircea Eliade, myth scholar)

W Dec 17 12:30 PM Class Myth